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PIETRO PIANA¹, CHARLES WATKINS², ROSS BALZARETTI³

TOPOGRAPHICAL ART AND HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY: AMATEUR ENGLISH REPRESENTATIONS OF LIGURIAN LANDSCAPE IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY⁴

Introduction

Since the 1970s scholars have studied representational landscape art to examine changing social conditions, the relationship between landscape and power, and as a source for interpreting past landscapes. Landscape and topographical art if carefully placed in its historical, social and cultural contexts can provide important insights into the way that land has been understood and managed (BARRELL, 1983; COSGROVE, DANIELS, 1988; COSGROVE, 2008; MITCHELL, 1994). There has recently been a resurgence in interest in studying topographical art. This had been encouraged by the rapid improvement in web-based access to images which formerly languished unseen in archives and collections. Probably the best example is the opening up of the huge collection of topographical materials held by the British Library. Scholars from different disciplines have analysed drawings, paintings, prints and maps which provide rich evidence «that topography involves far more than straightforward pictorial evidence of what a place looked like in the past» (see the British Library website, <https://www.bl.uk/picturing-places/about-the-project>). Felicity Myrone points out that

«the introduction of sharper distinctions between landscape art – usually involving some aspiration towards primarily aesthetic value – and the supposedly mundane, ‘topographical’ image-making has led to a potentially very valuable area for research into 18th-century artistic practices being overlooked» (MYRONE, 2016, <https://www.bl.uk/picturing-places/articles/looking-at-topographical-mages>).

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⁴ This paper is the result of joint research and fieldwork. Charles Watkins and Ross Balzaretti supervised the research. Charles Watkins wrote the Introduction and Conclusion, Ross Balzaretti wrote the Historical and Biographical Context and Pietro Piana wrote the central sections of the paper.

She argues that the careful interpretation of topographical art, taking account of the artist's motives, training, and the technologies available may help us «to expose a vision of the world». She questions whether we are wrongly categorising images «often created as sketches apparently drawn ‘on the spot’, as official records or as book illustrations» which can be used as «mere topography», and «pictorial evidence» (IBIDEM)? Topographical views of specific places need to be examined critically and, as with any other sources, this process raises problems of context of production, function, display and recollection.

One way in which such sketches drawn “on the spot” can be examined and understood is to reconnect and ground them with the physical landscapes, structures and places they are thought to represent. This can be attempted by identifying and trying to understand views through analysing map evidence and archival documents and undertaking field work at the sites to correlate the image with landscape features. Recent work by scholars from different disciplines sheds light on the «virtues of topography» opening up new research agendas (BARRELL, 2013). Godlevska, Letourneau and Schauerte for example identified a series of views of north Italian Napoleonic battlefields by Giuseppe Bagetti (GODLEVSKA, LÉTOURNEAU, SCHAUERTE, 2005). They combined information from local experts with a precise analysis of the details of the drawings, the proportions and the angle of views in order to pinpoint the viewpoints. Bonehill and Daniels analysed the topographical views of Paul Sandby linking his detailed views with the changing geography of Georgian Britain while Bainbridge has assessed the value of drawings, paintings and guidebooks as a medium to explore the aesthetics and emotional engagement of Victorian travellers in the topography of the Dolomites (BONEHILL, DANIELS, 2009; BAINBRIDGE, 2014 and 2017).

In Italy the approach to topographical art has been strongly influenced by the agronomist and politician Emilio Sereni (SERENI, 1961). His analysis of the Italian agricultural landscape combined different sources including many paintings and drawings. But his approach has been criticised for using art as a way of illustrating broad changes in landscape and society rather than as a focus of research itself (ROMANO, 1978; ROSSI, ROMBAI, 2011). Ambrosoli has considered the history of the Italian countryside through the analysis of foreign written accounts and providing views (sketches, paintings and photographs) illustrating the landscapes described by the travellers (AMBROSOLI, 2011). Other research has explored the use of topographical art to identify village settlement history, changing cultural attitudes to Italian pines and the reconstruction of past landscapes to understand recent flood risks (PIANA, WATKINS, BALZARETTI, 2016; FACCINI, PALIAGA, PIANA, WATKINS, 2016; DEVOTI, 2012). Recent Italian research on the historical ecology of the Ligurian Apennines has analysed topographical art in combination with written documents and field data. Moreno and Cevasco for example analyse the landscape of the common open pastures of the Genoese hills and use a

watercolour by Luigi Garibbo as visual evidence of the early nineteenth century landscape of the Bisagno Valley (MORENO, CEVASCO, 2014).

The identification of the virtues of topography has opened up an exciting new area of interdisciplinary research (BARRELL, 2013b; BONEHILL, DANIELS, 2009; GAYNOR, MCLEAN, 2008; LÜCKOFF, 2014; PIANA, BALZARETTI, MORENO, 2012). John Barrell has examined a series of Welsh views by the regional topographical artist Edward Pugh of Ruthin (1763-1813) who had a deep, detailed knowledge of a particular area (BARRELL, 2013a). He analysed the drawings, their subjects and their accuracy to help establish a connection between the artist and the landscape depicted. Barrell celebrates these once «minor» pieces of art that are in comparison with «sublime pictures», «more social than solitary, more about the way landscapes are inhabited, shared, possessed, argued over, exploited – for better or worse humanised» (BARRELL, 2013b, p. 18)⁵. This type of topographical art is produced through a deep understanding of the places depicted. But what about the topographical art produced by amateur tourists who made rapid sketches as they travelled through foreign landscapes?

Many visitors to Italy in the eighteenth century made drawings of the landscapes through which they travelled from city to city (INGAMELLS, 1997). Ann Bermingham has demonstrated the value of studying such amateur drawings «as a social practice rather than a purely artistic one» and noted how the «negligible quality» of the drawings and the «shadowy status of their authors» meant that until recently such drawings had gone «unnoticed and unremarked» (BERMINGHAM, 2000, p. x). The work of George Keate (1729-1797) is unusual in that one of his entertaining drawings *The manner of passing Mont Cenis* August 1755, showing a traveller in a chair with two poles being carried through Alpine scenery has been exhibited several times. But Kim Sloan has pointed out that «Because he was an amateur, the rest of his drawings in the album have been dismissed as ‘pedestrian’» (SLOAN, 2000, pp. 179-180). Keate himself apologised for the «incorrectness» of his drawings and argued in his defence that his «collection was begun by accident and completed without any knowledge of the rules of art». While he thought «the subjects of some of them are interesting» many would to strangers «appear trifling»; for him the drawings had served «only to fill up vacant hours, or to preserve the remembrance of places on the road» (KEATE, 1754-1756⁶).

The hiatus of the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars meant that few people ventured to Italy, but after 1815 there was a rapid increase in the number of English travellers. Many of these tourists made drawings of the landscapes through which they travelled. Their practices were influenced by the fashion for picturesque travel which had been popularised by William Gilpin's

⁵ There are of course in addition many professional artists and groups of artists who regularly depict tracts of countryside (ROSENTHAL, 1983; JONES, 2008; ENRICO, SEITUN, 2015).

⁶ www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details/collection_image_gallery.aspx?partid=1&assetid=466320001&objectid=725508

illustrated *Tours* published from the 1780s onwards. These provided formulae for celebrating and depicting certain types of mountain scenery, craggy cliffs, ruined castles, ancient trees and enfolding foliage (ANDREWS, 1989; COPLEY, GARSIDE, 1994; WATKINS, COWELL, 2012). Before 1815 English tourists in search of the picturesque were largely restricted to Wales, Scotland, Ireland and the northern and western parts of England; afterwards they were free to travel and sketch again on their travels to Italy. Such early nineteenth century amateur art often remains uncatalogued and unstudied. The artists themselves may be now be largely forgotten. Most of these works were taken home after the tour and remain in England in private and occasionally public collections and archives. The works of a minority of such amateur artists, such as Henrietta Fortescue, have been purchased by Italian art historians and collectors and are now in Italian collections. Fortescue's carefully labelled and depicted views of the Val d'Aosta have been exhibited and catalogued (AUDISIO, 1986).

In this paper we examine three topographical watercolours of Liguria made by Elizabeth Fanshawe and William Strangways. These two amateur artists have never been listed in standard dictionaries of British watercolourists and their almost unknown works are kept in private or local collections (MALLALIEU, 1986; HARDIE, 1968). We are interested in what caught their eye and how carefully and accurately they observed their subjects. We use three detailed case studies to investigate whether such amateur topographical views, when contextualised and compared with other sources, and related to the present day landscape, can provide important and original sources for historical and cultural geographers. The first study concerns the small inland village of Creverina in the Scrivia Valley, 35 km to the North of Genoa. The analysis of a single drawing by Elizabeth Fanshawe allows us to demonstrate its accuracy and relevance for precise knowledge of landscape history. The second shows some of the difficulties of working with amateur topographical sources in areas which have subsequently become urbanised. The third example considers how a drawing by William Strangways, combined with other sources, can contribute to knowledge of the historical impact of floods in Liguria.

Historical and biographical context

The territory of Liguria almost entirely matches that of the former Republic of Genoa, an independent state from 1005 to 1797 with great commercial, economic and naval power. The decline of Genoese authority started during the sixteenth century and resulted in the loss of independence in 1797, when it fell under the control of Napoleon who instituted the Democratic Ligurian Republic and then annexed the region to France in 1805. With the end of the napoleonic wars and after the Congress of Vienna, Genoa was taken over by the Sardinian Kingdom under the Savoy family (AIRALDI, 2007; ASSERETO, DORIA, 2007; CASTELNOVI, 2007; HOWARD, 1978). Major

reforms of the bureaucratic structure of the state, such as the production of the first modern land registers and road construction were undertaken after 1797. These efforts at modernisation were described by British visitors in their travel accounts as they drove back and forth along the narrow strip of land, known today as the Italian Riviera, which arches around the Gulf of Genoa. This coastal strip is surrounded by a continuous chain of mountains, the Ligurian Alps in the west and the Apennines in the East: it is a hilly and mountainous territory. The area was crossed by three major roads, the Aurelia, an ancient route along the coast dating back to Roman times and the Bocchetta and Giovi roads across the Apennines to link Genoa with the Po Valley to the North (STARKE, 1820; BROCKEDON, 1835). The area became increasingly popular for wealthy British winter visitors after 1815 and several left a record of their journeys and visits in the form of drawings and watercolours of the Ligurian landscape including coastal scenes, castles and forts, remote inland villages, modern roads and river valleys.

We investigate the production of two amateur topographical artists, Elizabeth Christiana Fanshawe (1779-1856) and William Strangways (1795-1865). In addition, a map by the Genoese cartographer Matteo Vinzoni (1690-1773) dated 1773 and those produced by the Sardinian Kingdom called *Minute di Campagna* (surveyed c. 1816-1829) are examined and compared with the drawings. Vinzoni was an engineer-cartographer who was engaged by the Republic of Genoa to make a cartographic survey of its territory. He was also employed by powerful aristocratic families such as the Brignole Sale and the Fieschi that still owned and managed vast territories in Liguria (CEVASCO, 2002; ROLLANDI, 1996, QUAINI, 1986). Elizabeth Fanshawe was the youngest of three daughters of John Fanshawe (1738-1816), a wealthy courtier in the household of King George III. Elizabeth and her two sisters Penelope (1764-1833) and Catherine Maria (1765-1834) had a wide social circle including several poets and artists who knew Italy well: Samuel Rogers whose influential poem *Italy* (1822) was reissued in 1830 with illustrations by Joseph Mallord William Turner and Thomas Stothard; the patron and amateur artist Sir George Beaumont who visited Rome in 1821-1822 and purchased Michelangelo's *Taddei Tondo* bequeathed to the Royal Academy in 1830, and Sir Thomas Lawrence, President of the Royal Academy 1820-1830. Although little is known about their childhood, surviving drawings, sketches and prints indicate that the three sisters received expert tuition. Elizabeth Fanshawe received several prizes from the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufacture and Commerce. In 1793 she gained a silver medal for her *View in Ireland*, in 1795 a «silver pallett» for her «landscape after nature» *View on the Tamer in Cornwall* and in 1797 a gold medal for a drawing *View near Ryegate* (*Transactions of the Society Instituted at London, for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce*, 1793, 1795 and 1797). A portfolio of 135 detailed watercolours of fungi painted 1799-1811 provides evidence of Elizabeth's interest and skill in natural sciences and botany. Most of the watercolours were dated and

had notes on the species and sites where they were collected. Catherine Maria Fanshawe, in her verse *Epistle on the subjects of botany, containing a tale and much good advice. By a lover of botanists*, celebrated her sister's ability to dissect plants «to name their genus, class and order»⁷.

An indication of Elizabeth's taste is provided by the artworks listed in her will of 1856, which included a landscape by Sir George Beaumont, drawings by the amateur artist Edward Swinburne, an *Agony in the Garden* by Carracci, a view of the Foro Traiano painted for Catherine Maria Fanshawe by Sir Charles Eastlake and a painting of Italian banditti by the Swiss artist Leopold Robert (1794-1835)⁸. The will also mentioned a large number of paintings, drawings and sketchbooks by the three sisters, including «Penelope's large book of drawings of our Tour in Italy» and a series of Elizabeth's drawings such as «two coloured & mounted drawings of the Lake of Geneva», «two green small folio books of my sketches», and «four of my mounted drawings of Nice and the environs»⁹. After Elizabeth's death the drawings were left to twelve different individuals and soon became dispersed. Amongst some recently discovered artworks by Elizabeth Fanshawe is a series of drawings relating to a tour to France, North-West Italy and Switzerland undertaken in 1828-1831. There are 32 small topographical drawings of the two parts of the Riviera and the Scrivia Valley, of which two are examined in this paper. These are drawn with pen and pencil with sepia watercolour washes and vary in size from 98 mmx128 mm to 157x160 mm. Her drawings are often numbered, dated and titled, allowing a precise reconstruction of her route. In her choice of subjects, Elizabeth Fanshawe was influenced by the fashion of the period for the picturesque and her landscapes depict mountains, the sea, trees, roads and villages (PIANA, BALZARETTI, MORENO, WATKINS, 2012; WATKINS, COWELL, 2012).

The Honourable William Fox-Strangways (1795-1865) was for most of his life a career diplomat but became 4th Earl of Ilchester in 1858 on the death of a brother. He travelled widely in Europe and Russia and was based in Naples in 1822 and Florence 1825-1828. He is now remembered mainly for his very significant gifts of early Italian paintings to Christ Church, Oxford, in 1828 and 1834 and his large donation to the University Galleries in 1850 including Paolo Uccello's *Hunt in the Forest* (BAKER, 2005). In addition to picture collecting he was a keen geologist and avid gardener and plant collector. He wrote on the geology of Russia during his St. Petersburg years and was elected fellow of the Geological Society of London in 1820¹⁰. While based in Vienna he was the

⁷ Christie's Sale 6267, 22 March 2000 Lot 39.

⁸ The National Archive, Last will and testament of Elizabeth Christiana Fanshawe, 14 February 1856.

⁹ The Italian experience of the Fanshawe sisters was not the only one. In the eighteenth century, for example, Lady Montague travelled through Genoa and Italy, leaving detailed descriptions of the social and physical landscape (see ROSSI, GOLDONI, 2004; ROSSI, 2005)

¹⁰ Strangways' interest focussed on both general aspects of Russian Geology (for example STRANGWAYS, 1822) and local features of the territory around St. Petersburg.

means of introducing into this country the seeds of the *Pinus austriaca* («Gentleman's Magazine», 1865, p. 368). His correspondence with his nephew Henry Fox Talbot, the pioneer of photography and gardener, shows that Strangways visited Liguria several times¹¹. His letters show curiosity and competence in botanical classification and identification: he tells Fox Talbot of his lack of success in finding *Antirrhinum latifolium* near Genoa and links it to a bad winter four years previously noting «the weather here depends on continental circumstances of which the peninsular part of Italy is independent»¹². He also reports on the difficulties of identifying pines: «I am in doubt whether the Pine of that coast is *Pinus Pinastre* or not it looks too poor I think for that – pray make out if they have *Pinus maritima* & *P. Halepensis* which I suspect»¹³.

Little is known about William Fox-Strangways' drawings however we recently discovered a series of thirteen pen and sepia ink drawings (265x380 mm) of the Ligurian coast and interior held by the Collezione topografica del Comune di Genova, which are catalogued as topographical views attributed to an artist named *Strongwayes*¹⁴. Most of the drawings are dated 1821, and this fits in with the period that William Strangways was in Italy. Both the artists we discuss in this paper are from wealthy, elite families, and had a keen interest in discussing and collecting art. They were also enthusiastic natural historians with an interest in depicting landscapes.

Questioning accuracy: Creverina and abandonment

Elizabeth Fanshawe made at least seven drawings on 3 June 1829, as she travelled North out of Genoa on the way to Novi Ligure. One is entitled *8 Val di Scrivia June 3d 1829* (fig. 1) but does not name the river or settlement depicted. We could only identify the site by placing the drawings made that day in sequence and following the *Strada Regia dei Giori* which is still one of the main routes along the valley. Analysis of contemporary maps, archives and fieldwork allowed the small village depicted to be identified as Creverina viewed from

¹¹ The Correspondence of William Henry Fox Talbot (<http://foxtalbot.dmu.ac.uk/index.html>; RUSSELL, HOBSON, 2016).

¹² The Correspondence of William Henry Fox Talbot, document no 320, 22 May (no year given).

¹³ The Correspondence of William Henry Fox Talbot, document no 323, 25 May 1823.

¹⁴ One of these has been published under that name in POLEGGI (1976, p. 191). These drawings were acquired by the Municipality of Genoa in 1937 from Mr Ernesto Bessone, but no information is held about their provenance or origin. Most of the drawings are dated 1821 and as there is no evidence that any person named Strongwayes visiting Genoa in the nineteenth century, it is probable that “Strongwayes” is a mistaken spelling for Strangways.

South to North¹⁵. The position of the shadows suggests that the drawing was made in the early evening which fits in with the timing of her journey. In the foreground lies the bed of the Scrivia River with several flat limestone rocks, and the steep and rocky right bank of the river, which is here at one of its narrowest and deepest stretches. This makes an ideal picturesque “station” from which to draw the village. One house is shown as being above the road, two are at the same level and six are in the section between the road and the Scrivia. Above the village there is a thick wood of broadleaved trees; the higher slopes appear to be clear of vegetation as are the two mountains in the background. This is the only known depiction of this small village and its surroundings before photography.



Figure 1. Elizabeth Fanshawe, June 3d 1829, wash drawing on paper (175×190 mm, private collection)

¹⁵ For methodological approaches using a variety of sources including sequences of maps, oral histories and field surveys in Liguria see for example MORENO (1990); BALZARETTI, PEARCE, WATKINS (2004); CEVASCO (2007).

The name Creverina first occurs in a seventeenth century document where the village is included within the Parish of San Michele of Isola (PEDEMONTE, 2012). The medieval origin of Creverina is indicated by architectural evidence, including a portal and a window, typical of that period and common to other settlements in the Scrivia Valley (CITI, BISIO, MAZZARELLO, PEDEMONTE, 2000). Today, Creverina, with its old limestone houses and buildings, some of which have been reconstructed and some abandoned and partly collapsed, appears to have a similar number and disposition of properties to the settlement drawn in June 1829. Therefore, it makes a good case study for evaluating the accuracy of Fanshawe's depiction. Local interviewees told us of an ancient inn located at the road level that collapsed in c. 1969 due to a landslide, traces of which are still evident today. They also mentioned that many old chestnut trees were felled in the 1950s, which suggests that many of the trees depicted by Elizabeth Fanshawe were large fruit chestnut trees, which frequently survive for more than 200 years. The woody slope above the village is now mixed broadleaved woodland with false acacia (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and fruit trees. The village is located on an ancient terrace of the Scrivia River that is now ten metres higher than the current bed (MERIANA, 1989). The limestone fluvial terrace and the difference in height from the Scrivia's current bed are depicted by Elizabeth Fanshawe in her drawing.



Figure 2. Elizabeth Fanshawe, *8 Val di Scrivia*, detail of the houses of Creverina

But how accurate was Fanshawe's representation of the village? One way of answering this question was to undertake a detailed comparison between the houses she depicted and those that survive today. Nine buildings were identified in the drawing and interviews with two of the oldest residents of the village and

fieldwork confirmed the precision and accuracy of her depiction (figs. 2-3). Local knowledge was crucial for the identification of the nine main buildings in the drawing and other landscape features of the area¹⁶. For example, building (1) survives and has been restored with a brick structure added below, but its former appearance corresponded to Fanshawe's drawing. On the ground floor there was a mill, in active use until c. 1915, which took water from the San Rocco torrent close to a locality called *La Chiusa* (the lock) using an elevated wooden canal which carried the water over the road, precisely where Elizabeth Fanshawe had drawn a straight white line, which could be the mill canal. Building (2) depicted by Fanshawe has been pulled down, but the local residents remembered that it existed and that it was a typical local Ligurian house with animals (horses in this case) kept on the ground floor, a family lived in the middle stories and hay was kept on the top floor, the driest room of the house.



Figure 3. The houses of Creverina (Pietro Piana, August 2012)

Map evidence also corroborates the accuracy of Fanshawe's drawing. According to the *Minuta di Campagna*, which was surveyed 1827-1829 in the same period as the drawing, Creverina was made up of fifteen buildings, twelve of which were below the main road (fig. 4). These houses were located along two parallel rows between the road and the Scrivia, with a narrow alleyway (*caruggio*) in the middle. The surrounding mountains had a few scattered houses and two settlements, Cascinette and Settefontane (seven springs) above Creverina where there used to be mills (MERIANA, 1989). Along the course of the San Rocco the canal described by local residents and depicted by Fanshawe

¹⁶ Emilio Seghezze who has lived in Creverina for 86 years provided great assistance in identifying the buildings shown in the view as did Stefano Zuccarino, 85, who owns a house that has been in his family since at least 1850.

Chestnuts were found near streams and *terre campive* (arable) and *terre alberate* (wooded fields, possibly with fruit trees) were on the sunny and less steep slopes. Along the side of the Scrivia Valley above Creverina, which is very steep in its lower part and gentler around Cascinette, fruit chestnuts were grown, in a context of open landscape characterised by wooded lands (*terre alberate*), in line with the type of landscape described by Giuseppe Bonini in 1799 and depicted by Fanshawe. The higher slope of the San Rocco Valley is rocky and steep: it was characterised by *terre castagnative* (chestnuts) and *terre seminatare* (arable) around Settefontane, while the rest of this part was mainly coppice described as *bosco ceduo*, *tagliata di castagne* or *scabbie* (POGGI, 2013). The *scabbie* in the Scrivia Valley were used for the production of charcoal in some places until the 1960s (MONTANARI, 2013). Vineyards were common along the southern side of the San Rocco Valley above Creverina, where *terre vignate* (vines) are listed at Erti or Erzi¹⁹. Just opposite Erzi, facing N, was the locality Ramá or Rumá, described by the mayor of Isola in 1835 as *selvatico* (wild) and *di nessuna utilità* (of no utility) for the community²⁰.

The land register of 1798 described four mills at Creverina which had been the property of Marquess Spinola before the declaration of the Ligurian Republic the year before in 1797. This indicates the socioeconomic changes that occurred with the abolition of the Imperial Fiefs in 1797 and the redistribution of lands and buildings formerly the property of noble families such as the Spinolas²¹. The precise whereabouts of the mills is uncertain; it is possible that two were in Creverina and another above the village along the San Rocco canal. Giuseppe Bonini mentioned only one mill in Creverina, while the *Minuta di Campagna* of roughly 30 years later shows three buildings in a line along the mill aqueduct between the *Strada Regia* and the Scrivia. Both interviewees confirmed the existence of one mill some distance from Creverina in the San Rocco Valley that was already abandoned in the early twentieth century.

There have been remarkably few physical changes to the village of Creverina since 1830 due to the lack of new development following massive emigration from the area in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This stable period of almost 200 years has allowed us to test the accuracy of aspects of Fanshawe's drawing against contemporary documents and maps and the present day landscape. The documents indicate that there was much wood pasture around the village with a prevalence of coppiced chestnut trees and some oaks. The area immediately below Creverina was probably a fruit chestnut wood used for the production of nuts. Elizabeth Fanshawe depicts the wood above the village that appears to be composed of some large trees, which have since disappeared. The prevalence of chestnut orchards was common to many

¹⁹ The white wine produced in Erzi was considered the best in the area; today wine is no longer produced. Stefano Zuccarino, personal comment (November 2012).

²⁰ ASG, Prefettura sarda 89, *Stato dei terreni appartenenti al Comune di Isola* (23 February 1835).

²¹ AMIC, *Denuncie di terreni*, p. 110.

other areas of inland Liguria and can be considered one of the most typical historical rural landscapes of the region (CEVASCO, MORENO, BALZARETTI, WATKINS, 2015, MORENO, 2013).

In the higher part the landscape was mainly open, and in some areas vineyards were reported. The open areas are now progressively disappearing due to the abandonment of the countryside. The wash drawing is accurate in its depiction of the agrarian landscape. The evidence from the village houses is particularly telling, with most of them clearly identifiable today, and reasons were provided by local residents for those properties no longer in existence.

It is not clear why Elizabeth Fanshawe focussed on this remote village of the Apennines, but the road here passes very close to the river and allows the traveller to explore the eroded limestone rocks. This road, which had been completed in the early 1820s, became the main route between Genoa and the North and was celebrated in guide books such as Brockedon's *Road-Book from London to Naples* published in 1835 as passing through 'varied and often beautiful scenes, in some places narrowed to a ravine, in others spread out into rich meadows which will recall home to the memory of the English traveller' (BROCKEDON, 1835, pp. 81-82). Creverina is not mentioned in this or any other guide, but it would have made an excellent resting place for English travellers in search of the picturesque.

Problems of identification: Bisaglio and urbanization

The second case study concerns a drawing by Elizabeth Fanshawe numbered 1 and dated 3 June 1829 which was taken earlier on the same day, and same journey, as the drawing of Creverina. The drawing relates to a site which is now part of Genoa's urban area, and it demonstrates the difficulties in identifying views in urban environments. The view is clearly entitled *Ruined Fort near Genoa* with the additional note *Bisaglio Torrent* (fig. 5). The identification of this view appears to be simple as it depicts a ruined fort on a prominent small hill near Genoa next to a named river, the Bisaglio. To the right of the fort there is a building which looks like a typical villa of the Genoese countryside. At first we interpreted the broad river bed and the flat bottom of a valley with surrounding steep slopes as the main valley to the East of Genoa, the Bisagno Valley and assumed the slightly different spelling to have resulted from a misheard transcription by Elizabeth Fanshawe. However, detailed fieldwork in the Bisagno valley failed to identify the site of the ruined fort. While several forts such as Forte Ratti, Forte Quezzi, to the west of the Bisagno, and Forte Castellaccio and Sperone to the East existed and there were battles between the French and the Anglo-Austrians during the 1780 siege of Genoa, no forts are

indicated close to the Bisagno in contemporary military cartography²². The fort is not mentioned in Casalis' list of Genoese forts published in his *Dizionario geografico storico statistico commerciale*, nor in any nineteenth and twentieth-century publication on the Bisagno Valley and the history of forts in Genoa (CASALIS, 1834). While it was possible that a small fortification may have been built during the siege and pulled down after Fanshawe drew it in 1829, it is unreasonable to believe that no trace could survive in the historical record.



Figure 5. Elizabeth Fanshawe, 1 / Ruined Fort near Genoa June 3^d 1829 / Bisaglio Torrent, wash drawing on paper (116x169 mm, private collection)

The drawing is numbered “1” and dated 3 June, as other drawings which when placed in sequence indicate a journey made out of Genoa towards Novi along the Polcevera and Scrivia valleys. Moreover it seems unlikely that she would have visited the Bisagno Valley to the East of Genoa on the same day as her journey through the Scrivia Valley to the West and North of the city. A reassessment of the cartographic evidence for the Polcevera Valley identified Castello di Bolzaneto as a potential site near the village of Bolsanetto (Bolzaneto) along the Strada Regia dei Giovi. This fort was built in 1380 to defend the city during the war between Genoa and Venice (1378-1381) although it may have an earlier origin during the Langobard invasions (CASALIS, 1834, p. 611; GIUSTINIANI, 1854, p. 141). It was occupied by Austrian troops

²² Corpo di Stato maggiore sardo, *Riviera di Levante alla quarta della scala di Savoia*, sc 1:9450 (1816-1827) sheet 78.

during the siege of Genoa in 1746, along with other forts of the Polcevera Valley (ACCINELLI, 1771-1773, p. 117). During the siege of 1800, when Genoa was occupied by the French, the fort was used by the Austrians, who were trying to conquer the city. It was then abandoned and by 1836 it was a ruin belonging to the aristocratic Cambiaso family (ZUCCAGNINI ORLANDINI, 1839, p. 628). The location fits Fanshawe's journey, as this was the road that she travelled along on 3 June 1829. We identified the point of view as from North to S, probably from a bridge over the Secca River which joins the Polcevera at that point. The hill on which the castle is built, called *Montebello*, was protected by wet, marshy land (called *Bratta*, mud, in Genoese) before it was reclaimed (LAMPONI, 1982). It is now heavily urbanized and almost impossible to distinguish from the rest of the left-hand side of the Polcevera, where Bolzaneto lies. The remains of the castle were converted into a villa in the early twentieth century; today it is a hospital (BUFFONI, COGORNO, 1987, pp. 57-58).

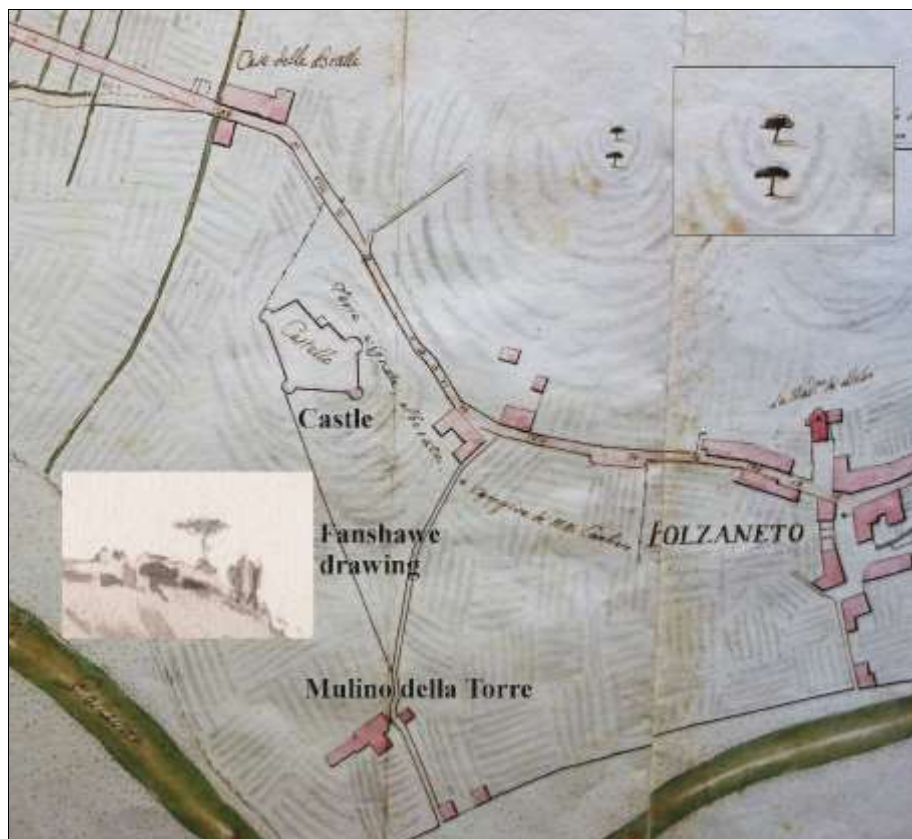


Figure 6. Anonymous, Bolzaneto in the C19th (detail). Genova, Centro DocSai, coll. Topografica

Cartographical evidence helps to back up the location of Fanshawe's drawing. A mid nineteenth century map of the area shows that the torrent was wider than today and crops are indicated along the Secca with a group of buildings standing along the Polcevera. These were labelled *Mulino della Torre* (tower mill) on a later map of the second half of the nineteenth century, a name linked to the nearby castle (fig. 6)²³. The hill of Montebello is shown as cultivated arable land with vines and fruit trees. It appears mainly bare in Fanshawe's wash drawing, with a solitary stone pine (*Pinus pinea*) standing on the top of the hill. Stone pines would have been a significant landscape feature in this stretch of the valley, and two symbols indicating this tree were drawn on the map on a hill just above Montebello.

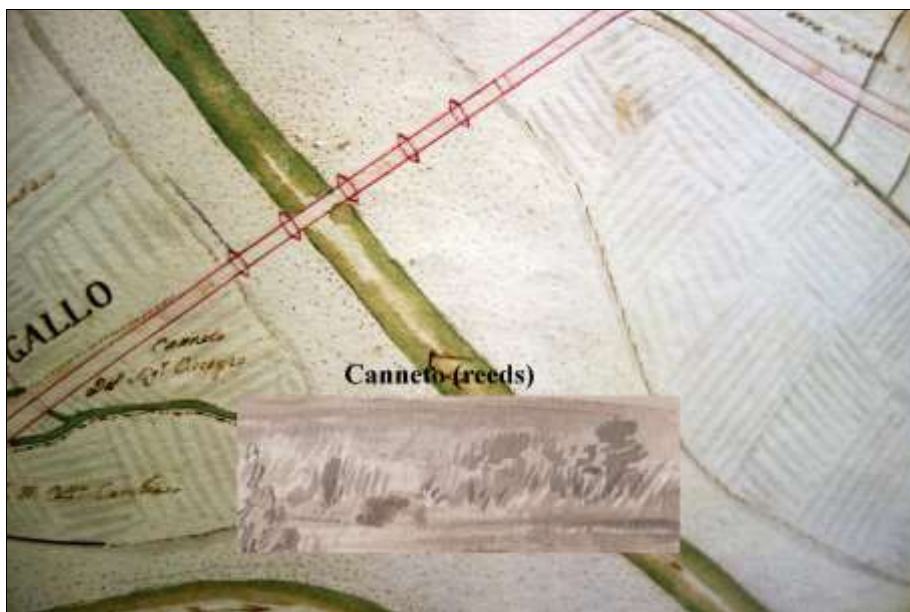


Figure 7. Anonymous, Bolzaneto in the C19th, detail (Genova, Centro DocSai, coll. Topografica)

This nineteenth century map also shows the bridge over the Secca and the land adjoining it belonged to Sig. Ciccopeo and is characterised by a *canneto* (reed bed) just where Fanshawe shows some thick vegetation with reed-like growth in the foreground (fig. 7). Such reeds were often planted to help protect the properties from the river and reduce the flow of the torrent during the floods. In the right background Fanshawe depicts a large white house which is probably the mill next to the castle indicated on the map. Fieldwork revealed that the bed of the Secca and Polcevera is now narrower

²³ SEVERINO PICASSO, *Bolzaneto: Pianta dell'abitato*. Genova, Centro DocSai, coll. Topografica 2/PB.

than in Fanshawe's view as factories and warehouses have been built on made-up ground. But what about the title given by the artist to the drawing? The word *Bisaglio* is probably a mis-transcription of the name *S. Biagio*, which is the name of the small village next to Bolzaneto. It would be very easy for Elizabeth Fanshawe to mishear the pronunciation of the location and the similarity of the names *Biagio* and *Bisagno* shows how apparently precise topographical labels can be inaccurate and misleading. The drawing is a good example of a view which was particularly difficult to identify due to the inexact location indicated by the artist and the urbanisation that took place after 1830. It is also an important document for the landscape history of this area since no other pictures of the fort have been found for the early nineteenth century.

Visualizing the effects of floods in the Vara Valley

The third case study examines a drawing by William Strangways as a potential source for the landscape history of floods in Liguria and the Vara Valley in particular. English visitors to Liguria frequently commented on dramatic storms, floods and the destruction of bridges which impeded travel. A devastating flash flood was witnessed by Lord Byron at Genoa in October 1822. He was staying at a villa in the wealthy Genoese suburb of Albaro just to the East of the River Bisagno and told his stepsister Augusta Raleigh

«We had a deluge here – which has carried away half the country between this and Genoa – (about two miles or less distant) but being on a hill we were only nearly knocked down by the lighting and battered by columns of rain – and our lower floor afloat – with the comfortable view of the all landscape under water – and people screaming out of their garret windows – two bridges swept down – [...]. The whole came on so suddenly that there was no time to prepare – think only at the top of the hill – of the road being an impassable cascade – and a child being drowned a few yards from it's own door (as we heard say) in a place where water is in general a rare commodity» (MARCHAND, 1822-1823, pp. 28-30).

This flood is corroborated by contemporary accounts: it started on the night of Thursday 24 October and was limited to the basin of the Bisagno and Sturla Valleys between Genoa and Monte Fasce («Il Gazzettino di Genova», 30 October 1822, 334).

Further down the coast to the South-East the River Vara, which joins the River Magra near Ceparana, before reaching the sea at Bocca di Magra just West of Sarzana, was also prone to flooding. Floods were often reported by travellers: author Mary Berry (1763-1852) travelled extensively in Europe and Italy and visited the Vara and the Magra valleys in 1823 describing the great difficulties she faced when fording the Magra:

«The rain which had fallen, and was still falling had swelled the stream... I watched the moment when one horse after the other fell into the full force of the torrent, when their guide was thrown over into the water, and when the carriage could not move» (LEWIS, 1865, pp. 340-341).

The crossing of the Magra continued to be very difficult for travellers, particularly in the Autumn and Winter months (BALZARETTI, PIANA, WATKINS, 2015). A topographical drawing by William Strangways shows the landscape of the stretch of the Vara Valley near the post-house of Borghetto (fig. 8). The view is not dated, but it was most probably made during Strangways' trip across Liguria in 1821²⁴. The river occupies the foreground with its wide bed and in the centre there is a broken bridge, which also gives the title to the drawing. Near the bridge to the E, a church with a building is identified by Strangways as the «Convent of Franciscans» surrounded by mixed vegetation that includes a dense plantation or thicket. On the nearby mountains two villages are labelled by Strangways as «Cornicia» (left) and «Bucola» (right), which correspond to present-day Cornice and Bozzolo.



Figure 8. William Fox Strangways, Broken bridge over the Vara, Pont de Var, nr Borghetto in the Apennines (illegible) / V Convent of Franciscans / VV Bucola / VVV Cornicia / Distant mountains, wash drawing on paper (265x376 mm; Genova, Centro DocSai, coll. Topografica)

In the background he outlines some mountains defined as «distant mountains» in his notes at the top of the drawing. This annotation shows that

²⁴ 1821 is the date of some other drawings of the same series held by the CTCG.

Strangways' eye was caught by this far group of unnamed mountains which can be identified as the group of Monte Gottero (1639 m.), the highest mountain of the La Spezia Province and one of the most important of the Ligurian Apennines, the watershed between the Tyrrhenian Sea and the Po valley. The cartographer and geographer Matteo Vinzoni described the plain at Brugnato as *fertilissimo* (very fertile) and producing cereals, walnuts, vegetables, vines and chestnuts (VINZONI, 1773, p. 20). A land register of 1798 provides information about the agrarian landscape of the area of the drawing²⁵. The Guani family owned many fields along the Vara near the Convent²⁶. Francesco Guani owned *terra seminativa e vignata* (a field with arable and vines) in *luogo detto al Ponte* (next to the bridge), while Gio Batta Guani had a *terra castaneata* (field with chestnuts) in a place called *Canovedo*²⁷. Many of the plots consisted of mixed trees and crops, often with vines growing up fruit trees or poplars. The register shows many wooded fields along the Vara and Strangways shows a thick group of trees that looks like an even-aged plantation of young poplars which would grow well next to the river (fig. 9). But this woodland is not indicated on the contemporary Minuta di Campagna (fig. 11) and in this instance the drawing provides an important additional source of information about the riparian vegetation in the early nineteenth century. It is known that plantations of poplars were common along rivers and encouraged by agriculturalists to control the floods (DEL NOCE, 1849, p. 129). In many parts of central and northern Italy they were also used to support the vines that grew high up into the trees (SERENI, 1961).



Figure 9. William Fox Strangways, *Broken bridge over the Vara*, detail of poplars along the Vara

The broken bridge of Brugnato is the principal subject of this drawing; its picturesque characteristics are emphasised by the context of hilltop villages,

²⁵ Archivio di stato di La Spezia (ASL), Fondo Vecchio catasto terreni (Brugnato) volume 3, Catasto dei fabbricati e terreni del Comune di Brugnato 1798.

²⁶ Don Sandro Lagomarsini, personal communication (October 2012).

²⁷ ASL, Fondo Vecchio catasto terreni (Brugnato) Catasto dei fabbricati e terreni 1798, pp. 24 and 39.

wooded hills and the deeply incised Vara Valley. The bridge has four surviving irregular arches and the remains of at least one additional arch are shown on the western end, which has completely collapsed. The bridge rises slightly towards the middle of the river as is characteristic of Ligurian bridges which have higher central arches to try and cope with floods (fig. 10). The Minuta di Campagna of c. 1820 (fig. 11) confirms that the bridge of Brugnato had collapsed at its western end and was impassable. Two proposals for the reconstruction of the bridge survive from the 1820s. The first includes a plan which shows the bridge in 1824 with a missing pillar indicated in red and two missing arches on the western end opposite the Franciscan convent²⁸. The distance between the standing pillars is irregular, the two central pillars being closer to each other than the external ones. This characteristic is carefully shown by Strangways in his drawing which is evidence of his precision as an artist.



Figure 10. William Fox Strangways, *Broken bridge over the Vara* (detail of the bridge)



Figure 11. Corpo di Stato maggiore sardo, *Riviera di Levante alla Quarta della Scala di Savoia ossia di 1 a 9450*, 1816-1827 (sc 1:9450, sheet 30, detail the broken bridge of Brugnato and the Convent). Dai documenti originali archiviati presso le conservatorie storiche dell'Istituto Geografico Militare. (Autorizzazione n. 7005 in data 07/12/2018)

The second proposal of 1828 gives a brief overview of the bridge's history and argued that it was crucial to the local road network as it was the only one in the Vara Valley between Cornice and the confluence with the Magra and formed an important link between the upper Vara Valley and Borghetto²⁹. The report also pointed out that the bridge had been damaged by a recent flood, although no

²⁸ ASL, Fondo Prefettura (Contratti di ogni genere), volume 7, *Piano geometrico di un tronco del Torrente Vara a Brugnato ed intermedio ai due Comuni Pignone e Brugnato sopra il quale deve essere costruito due archi per compire il ponte esistente in conformita' del piano e relativi tipi, rilevata del geometra Emanuele Piaggio*, 1824.

²⁹ ASL Fondo Prefettura (Contratti di ogni genere), Vol VII Provincia di Levante, Comune di Borghetto, *Ristoro del ponte di Brugnato sul Torrente Vara*, Relazione, 6 aprile 1828.

date was given. It was mentioned in a document of 1723 when during a pastoral visit Monsignor Niccolò Leopoldo Lomellini went to the chapel of San Lazzaro, «a third of mile from Brugnato, next to the bridge»³⁰. Moreover Matteo Vinzoni's map of 1773 shows the bridge linking Borghetto and Brugnato (VINZONI, 1773, p. 20). Thus the two arches of this bridge depicted in 1821 were probably destroyed by a flood between 1773 and 1821.

There is historical evidence of several floods between the seventeenth century and the end of the eighteenth century. Monsignor Lomellini criticised the administration of the hospital at Brugnato by the local inhabitants in 1723. He castigated them reporting that «confessano loro stessi essere castigati dall'Altissimo col permettere che il fiume Vara unito con l'altro chiamato Cravegnola habbia oramai sottomesso e divastato tutta la pianura del luogo di Brugnato» («the Most High had already punished them by allowing the Vara and the Cravegnola to invade and devastate all the plain in the place of Brugnato, as they admitted themselves»)³¹. The 1799 *Inchiesta* written by Angelo Maria Fontanabuona, priest of Borghetto, provides evidence of annual destructive floods in the area. He mentions a flood of the seventeenth century which destroyed part of the village and killed half the population and noted that Borghetto

«is located on a peninsula between the Vara River and the Pogliaschina Torrent, both of them flooding the village more than once every year: in some cases water reaches the first floors of the buildings and this happens mainly in September, October and November»³².

Evidence of the need for extensive building work to secure the banks along the right side of the river is provided in the left foreground of the drawing by Strangways by the large sustaining wall indicating that in the early nineteenth century the bed of the Vara was managed in order to limit the floods. This analysis shows that this view, which was probably produced by Strangways for his personal recollection, provides detailed information which adds to that gained from other sources on flooding, river management and land use change in the Val di Vara.

Conclusion

In this paper we consider the value of amateur topographical drawings made by English visitors to northwest Italy. George Keate noted in 1756 that his

³⁰ Archivio vescovile Sarzana, *Visita pastorale monsignor Niccolò Leopoldo Lomellini*, volume A, 11 March 1723, folio 8 r.

³¹ IVI, folio 8 v.

³² ASG Repubblica ligure 610, *Inchiesta dell'Istituto nazionale*, giurisdizione Gromolo e Vara, doc. *Borghetto* 10 March 1799. Borghetto was severely affected by the flood of 25 October 2011 which killed thirteen people and caused very substantial damage.

amateur art had helped him to «fill up vacant hours» when travelling (KEATE, 1754-1756³³). With the increase in travellers after 1815 hundreds of travellers made many sketches and drawings to fill up time, perhaps while waiting around for a change of horses, walking up a hill to ease the burden of the animals or simply taking a break for lunch. He also pointed out that they were made to «preserve the remembrance of places on the road» (IBIDEM). Such art was usually placed in albums on the return home, and would be shown to visitors to illustrate accounts of the journey, and remind the artist of places visited. We know that Elizabeth Fanshawe carefully kept albums of her own drawings, and those of her sisters, at her London home in 70 Harley Street, until her death, and identified specific friends to whom they should be left. Ann Bermingham has shown the value of studying such art in understanding the «social practice» of drawing (BERMINGHAM, 2000). In this paper we argue that in addition we can learn about the subjects and views depicted by reconnecting such drawings with the places in which they were made, confronting them with the physical landscape and interrogating them against maps and archival evidence.

We focus on three amateur topographical drawings made by two foreign travellers in early nineteenth-century Liguria, Elizabeth Fanshawe and William Strangways. We argue that such frequently unconsidered art should be taken more seriously as significant, scholarly sources. The three case studies which combine topographical art with archival sources, travel writing, field survey and oral history demonstrate that such apparently ephemeral topographical art provides additional information and data unobtainable from the other sources by themselves. This method draws upon multidisciplinary approaches to the historical ecology and landscape history of Liguria. Once the view is securely identified, further analysis of the particular landscape features depicted in the drawing can be carried out. Additional documents can be used to integrate and compare the information provided by the drawing. These include estate papers, guide books, archival papers, local publications and oral sources. The influence that traditions of drawing and the political context had in the production of these sources is of importance. An amateur artist, like Elizabeth Fanshawe, could make topographical views of her journey across Liguria to record the landscapes she visited and enjoyed and to develop her artistic skills with particular subjects such ruined castles, rivers and mountain villages informed by her knowledge of the tradition of picturesque subjects and design.

The analysis of the view of Creverina and its comparison with other documents demonstrated the accuracy of the drawing. The topographical view depicted a specific place, but was not necessarily aimed at the precise rendering of the scene as a whole, rather at stressing what the artist thought to be worth recording for her personal recollection. The detailed analysis of the drawing and scrutiny of its title and associated marginalia and text is essential. If on one hand

³³ http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details/Collection_image_gallery.aspx?partid=1&assetid=466320001&objectid=725508.

topographical accuracy means that the view can be considered a reliable source for landscape history, on the other hand it allows broader considerations on the landscape perception of the Ligurian landscape by foreign travellers. For travellers, sketching landscapes was in some ways similar to taking digital photographs today, but in sketching one «did not snap and run» and «time and patience taken for the sketch testified the reverence that many travellers had for what they were seeing» (MUNSON, MULLEN, 2009). Elizabeth Fanshawe devoted her time and artistic skills to the accurate depiction of a «normal» place which is today completely forgotten by tourism. As the first railway between Genoa and Turin was inaugurated in 1853, such little Apennine villages became marginal and no other nineteenth-century views of Creverina are known to exist.

The second case study indicated that these views, most of which were meant to be produced as private record and only shared with friends and acquaintances, require interpretative frameworks as well as a specific methodological approach. The Bisaglio example showed that titles can be misleading and detailed contextual research is necessary. Fieldwork was essential to locate the drawing and consider its accuracy, style and genre and identify changes that have occurred in the landscape. In the broad context of Liguria this is especially likely around the major city of Genoa and along the coast where there has been extensive tourist development. Historical maps and plans were essential sources which provided evidence of past landscape features now lost or modified due to urbanization and industrialization, allowing a precise location of the view. The third case study looked at the impact of floods and the fluvial landscape of the Vara Valley in Eastern Liguria through the eyes of William Strangways. Liguria is periodically affected by destructive flood events and scholars are increasingly considering the value of historical sources to investigate past flood events and provide broader insights into the way rivers are managed (FACCINI, LUINO, TURCONI, SACCHINI, 2015; FACCINI, PALIAGA, PIANA, SACCHINI, WATKINS, 2016). In the case of both Strangways in the Vara and Fanshawe in the Polcevera Valley, the views provide additional information into the landscape history of rivers, particularly in terms of land use and vegetation. In this case, the reliability of this information is corroborated by the artists' botanical knowledge and their skills in depicting the natural elements of the landscape.

The three case studies provide practical examples of how amateur topographical art can be an important source for historical and cultural geographers. The views reveal much about the cultural context in which they were produced; in the case of Liguria they provide insights into the landscape perception of nineteenth-century foreign tourists and open up new research themes. We argue that by grounding the drawings in the specific places that they depict, we can add value both to the interpretation of the drawing itself, and our understanding of the place it represents. Knowledge of place is as important as knowledge of the artist in interpreting these valuable drawings.

Topographical art if correctly interpreted and contextualized can reveal knowledge and details which allows past landscapes to become more tangible.

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TOPOGRAPHICAL ART AND HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY: AMATEUR ENGLISH REPRESENTATIONS OF LIGURIAN LANDSCAPE IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY – This paper assesses the value of amateur topographical art for historical geographers and landscape historians. It examines the work of two amateur artists, Elizabeth Fanshawe and William Strangways, made in Liguria, northwest Italy, to assess the value of topographical art for understanding past landscapes. The identification and examination of the views takes advantage of a multidisciplinary approach which involves the use of historical cartography, oral history, written documents and field surveys. Three detailed case studies are used which provide insights into the landscape perception of early nineteenth-century foreign tourists and the cultural context in which they were produced. The determination of precise location allows rapidly sketched drawings to be understood and interrogated at the places they depicted. We argue that by grounding the drawings in this way we can add value both to the interpretation of the drawing itself and our understanding of the place it represents.

ARTE TOPOGRAFICA E GEOGRAFIA STORICA: RAPPRESENTAZIONI DEL PAESAGGIO LIGURE DA PARTE DI ARTISTI DILETTANTI INGLESI NELLA LIGURIA DI PRIMO OTTOCENTO – Questo contributo intende considerare il valore del vedutismo topografico ad opera di artisti dilettanti per ricerche in geografia storica e storia del paesaggio. In particolare, l'articolo si concentra su una serie di vedute inedite della Liguria da parte di due artisti dilettanti inglesi dell'Ottocento, Elizabeth Fanshawe e William Strangways, esaminando il loro potenziale come fonti per la storia del paesaggio. La localizzazione e analisi delle vedute si avvale di un approccio multidisciplinare che coinvolge l'uso di cartografia storica, fonti orali, documenti scritti e dati di terreno. Il focus della ricerca è costituito da tre casi di studio che forniscono informazioni utili a comprendere la percezione del paesaggio ligure da parte dei viaggiatori stranieri dell'Ottocento e il contesto artistico in cui queste fonti furono prodotte. La localizzazione delle vedute, spesso poco più che schizzi di viaggio, consente una precisa analisi dei contenuti e un confronto con il paesaggio attuale. L'articolo intende dimostrare come quest'approccio alle fonti possa conferire nuovo interesse alle vedute topografiche, aiutando a comprendere la storia e l'evoluzione dei paesaggi raffigurati nei disegni.

KEYWORDS: Topographical art; Landscape history; Land use changes; Liguria; History of travel; Climate history.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Arte topografica; Storia del paesaggio; Cambiamenti di uso del suolo; Liguria.